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ABSTRACT

Cognitive frameworks are the common meanings that a group of people share as they perceive things, communicate, explain events, understand connections between events, and interpret their world. This paper explores the use of the concept of shared cognitive frameworks in formulating methods for improving public schools. The analysis is based on data collected from observation of nine school improvement projects that emphasized the enhancement of schools' problem solving capacities. One section of the paper discusses the San Andreas Cultural Continuity Project, which sought to bring about school improvement through workshops that aimed to raise consciousness and develop a shared framework among school staff, parents, and the community concerning the concept of discontinuities between the culture of American public schools and the culture of black children. A second section examines how the concept of shared cognitive frameworks contributes to understanding of school improvement, and discusses problems associated with the concept. A final section provides a brief review of theoretical literature on cognitive frameworks and their importance in promoting social change. It is emphasized that the cognitive framework approach for problem solving in urban schools sees problems not as disparate, but as interconnected parts of larger social events. (Author/MJL)

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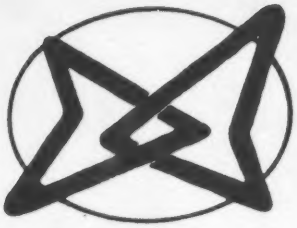

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Analysis of the Concept of Shared Cognitive Frameworks as a Key to Promoting School Improvement

Stephen H. Wilson, Ph.D.

August 1979

UD 022 754

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Documentation and Technical Assistance in Urban Schools Project (DTA) is an effort to learn more about how to make urban public schools work better for urban students. Toward this end, DTA combines educational research and practice within one project. DTA's mandate has three interrelated parts:

> DOCUMENTATION - to study, using primarily ethnographic techniques, the ways in which selected urban schools organize themselves to solve problems. Documentation focuses upon nine sites throughout the country selected and funded by NIE to continue to engage in locally initiated improvement activities.
>
> TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - to develop in practice specific strategies which are designed to improve urban public schooling. Technical assistance strategies are based in part upon documentation of useful practices in the nine funded sites.
>
> LINKAGE - to increase understanding, through observation of DTA's attempts to link documentation with technical assistance, of the processes through which research can be useful to practice, and practice can influence research.

Our work is designed to effect school improvement through direct work in urban public schools and through sharing what we learn with the following audiences: parents, teachers, and administrators of urban public schools; the educational research community; groups or agencies working to assist urban schools; policy makers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Project Overview.....i

Acknowledgements.....ii

Introduction.....1

Data and Research Process.....5

Section II: San Andreas Cultural Continuity Project.....7

Section III: Ways in which the Concept of Shared Cognitive Frameworks Contributes to our Understanding of School Improvement and Problems with the Concept.....13

A. Contribution of Frameworks.....13

B. Difficulties with the Concept of Frameworks.....16

Section IV: Review of Relevant Theoretical Literature.....20

A. What are Cognitive Frameworks?.....21

B. Differences among Frameworks and "Correctness" of Frameworks.....23

C. Cognitive Frameworks and Social Change.....27

Conclusion.....31

References.....34

Introduction

Why are some local school settings more effective than others in working to solve problems and in supporting improvement acitivities in a sustained way? Some analysts (e.g. NIE, 1973) have hypothesized that particular settings have "capacities for problem solving" and that features or organizational arrangements can be identified which account for these capacities. The Documentation and Technical Assistance Project (DTA) was funded by the National Institute of Education to explore what these organizational arrangements might be and how they might be developed in school settings.

As well as documenting traditional themes in school change, DTA research has uncovered little-studied characteristics which seem to contribute to the ability of school settings to work to improve themselves, features of the settings which are typically overlooked. We call one of these features "cognitive frameworks". By cognitive frameworks* we mean the shared

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*The reader should be alert that we are using the term cognitive frameworks in a special way. We are using it to cover a variety of ideas not usually put together. Most frequently the term cognitive framework is used by anthropologists (e.g. Tyler, 1969) to mean the very basic patterning of thought that goes on when someone learns a language or other cultural mores. This patterning shapes the way those persons perceive the world and the ways they explain events.

Other analysts use related concepts which point to group agreements about how to perceive the world and what categories to use in understanding events, but do not concentrate on such basic mental structures as language and cultural mores. For example, Kuhn (1962) uses the concept of "paradigms" to describe patterns of thought which cause scientists to shape the way they think about their research and Marxists (e.g. Lukacs, 1972) use the concept "class consciousness" to describe the class related patterns of thought which shape the way people in different social positions perceive and explain societal events.

We have used the term cognitive frameworks to describe this whole class of concepts. We recognize there are differences, but feel there are important similarities that make it worth using the term for the whole class. See the review of the theoretical literature for more discussion on this issue.

meanings a group of people use for interpreting their world. These shared meanings guide perception, allow people to communicate with each other, provide explanations for events and help people to understand connections between seemingly disparate happenings. Cognitive frameworks allow people to convert the confusion of the world into meaningful units.

We see cognitive frameworks as patterns of thought which provide the categories by which people perceive the world--for example, in seeing a person does another person perceive him/her primarily in terms of kin group, sex, class, occupation or what? Cognitive frameworks can also be seen as the implicit patterns of cause and effect that people customarily use to explain events--for example, when someone gets sick, is it attributed to demons or to the malfunctioning of bodily systems? Obviously, these patterns have a wide range of origins--stretching from those which seem unconscious and arise because a person is a part of a certain culture or speaks a particular language to those which arise because a person has consciously come to accept a particular ideology or theory.

Each individual in going about his or her daily life normally uses multiple frameworks learned as a result of simultaneous membership in various kinds of human communities. Furthermore, this process is fairly unsystematic; people unconsciously and rapidly shift the frameworks they use as they pass through different situations. This haphazard, casual process of interpreting the world is seen by some social critics as missing out on a potentially powerful way for human communities to accomplish their goals. Specifically for our concerns, this lack of systematic attention to cognitive frameworks is seen as part of the reason urban schools do not regularly and successfully work to improve themselves. In this view a consentient cognitive framework and a shared commitment to a disciplined and skilled

process of refining it and using it to guide daily activities are key features which support ongoing self-improvement attempts.

An example will perhaps illustrate what a shared cognitive framework looks like and how it might aid in school self improvement. The key staff of the San Andreas Cultural Continuity Project*, which we describe in more detail in Section 2, believed in the importance of a consensually accepted framework in action. The staff believed that there is a critical discontinuity between the culture of the schools and the culture of black children, families and communities. The school's programs, thus, were not shaped to best attend to the styles, strengths, and aspirations of black students. Furthermore, they believed that the established powers systematically worked to deny black communities the genuine opportunity to shape their schools in ways the community sees they need to be shaped.

The staff of this project believed that the long-term ability of these schools to improve themselves depended on concerned educators and parents coming to affirm this perspective, to see the importance of constantly using these perspectives to understand events, to continually seek to refine this perspective as a result of experience, and to use these understandings to plan actions. They believed that this consistent cognitive framework focusing on the discontinuity of school and black community would enable those trying to improve the schools to identify the same problems as the most important, to perceive events in similar ways, to agree upon common analyses of the causes of problems, and to plan and act effectively and efficiently in working to solve problems.

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*For the sake of anonymity the names of all the sites we studied have been changed to pseudonyms.

Distinguishing between cognitive frameworks and shared philosophies or visions may help to clarify the issue of definitions. Two people could both have the same goal or vision and disagree greatly about such things as how any particular event can be perceived and about the best pathways to the goals. Those who concur on cognitive frameworks, however, share a view of cause and effect and would be much more likely to share interpretations at all stages. The shared goals and visions indeed can contribute to effective joint action but not nearly as powerfully as can shared cognitive frameworks.

Does the power of a framework reside in the accuracy and penetration of its analysis of social events or in the fact that a group of people accept a common perspective and value increasing their understanding of that perspective and acting in accordance with it? Would any comprehensive shared belief system systematically used as a basis of action be equally effective?

We suspect the impact of frameworks derives from both the intrinsic cogency of the framework's contents and from the process of systematically refining and applying any set of shared perspectives. The fact that the framework at the core of the San Andreas Cultural Continuity Project is not the only one we have seen supporting improvement actions in the sites we have studied illustrates our conviction that something besides content is important. Other sites used other frameworks. Similarly, it is clear that both the content of the San Andreas framework and the process used in that site to elaborate the framework contributed to its strength. (See section II for a description of the San Andreas project which illustrates this point.)

This paper presents a theoretical overview of the possible contributions of using the concept of shared cognitive frameworks in analyzing methods of improving public schools. Section II briefly describes the work of the San Andreas Cultural Continuity Project as an example of a site where

the emphasis was on shared cognitive frameworks. Section III raises some of the problems arising from the use of shared cognitive frameworks as a key concept. In Section IV we review some of the theoretical literature currently available, largely from traditions not usually associated with organizational or educational change. Our purpose is both to further the analysis of school functioning and change and to support those actively trying to improve schools. Practitioners may also find interesting the companion paper, "Fostering School Improvement by Working with Cognitive Frameworks", analyzing what has made helpers effective and some of the specific techniques used when working with cognitive frameworks.

Data and Research Process

Our analysis is based on data collected in nine school improvement projects selected by the National Institute of Education as promising examples of attempts to build capacities for problem solving. DTA conducted qualitative case study research of these projects. The data consist of case studies written by site researchers in those sites, field data forms (condensation of field notes), site-produced documents, verbal reports by researchers, and some limited first hand observations and interviews by the author. The longer report on which this paper is based intensively analyzed three of those sites. To fit journal format, this paper concentrates on one, San Andreas.

In DTA we stressed the development of grounded theory. We did not start out with the intention of testing the importance of cognitive frameworks in ongoing problem solving. Rather, the relevance and potential

power of this concept emerged through consideration of how people in the sites saw their worlds and through early analysis of preliminary observations. (For a general description of the process of generating grounded theory see Glaser and Strauss, 1967.) As with all grounded theory, the process of on-going theory generation is a mixed blessing. On one hand, because the concepts "arose" from the data, we have confidence in their validity and genuineness. On the other hand, beacuse we did not design the study specifically to explore cognitive frameworks, we often have incomplete data and have not been able to refine our ideas as far as we would have liked. The fact that this paper is based on secondary anlaysis of data gathered by others has limited the claims we can make. For more on the nine sites, the design of the research and the secondary analysis process, see the methodology appendix of the paper, "Explorations of the Concept of Local Capacity for Problem Solving", (Wilson, 1977).

The reader should be aware that this paper will candidly share doubts and questions that have arisen in our analysis. Don't be misled, however, into concluding that we doubt that shared cognitive frameworks and institutionallzed processes for elaborating them are important positive features of school communities and potentially valuable foci for improvement efforts. <u>The only way research will genuinely promote social change is through a process of researchers confronting honestly limitations in their analysis and openly sharing and exploring those reservations.</u>

Section II

San Andreas Cultural Continuity Project*

As we mentioned in the introduction, the central perspective underlying the work of the project was a conviction that the culture of American public schools is discontinuous with the culture of the black child, family and community. Life in schools does not reflect the aspirations, styles, values and strengths of the culture of the students. Furthermore, the mainstream society, because of racism, is indifferent or even hostile to the realization of institutional reforms for schools which are genuinely responsive to black culture and which equip black youth to help in the struggle to better the conditions of their people and the society in general. Active, sophisticated, and powerful parent involvement is seen as one important way to push for continuity between the two cultures.

The project staff offered workshops for the staffs of these schools, made themselves available for day to day consultation, and worked intensively and informally with a small group of especially interested teachers. With educators the work focused on raising their consciousness about the cultural discontinuity, helping them to reshape their classrooms to better serve black students, and helping them to establish responsive links with the parents and the community as a way of supporting continuity.

With parents, the work focused on raising their consciousness about the discontinuity, helping them to understand the culture of schools, teaching them the skills to be effective in political action and helping them to establish structures to guarantee themselves a role in influencing school

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*For more detailed description of this site see Smith, 1979.

actions. The project sought to accomplish this work with parents by focusing on a parent cadre composed of what they called parent consultants. The cadre was a small group of paid parents with whom the staff worked intensively. This cadre had the responsibility for promoting and coordinating the involvement of other parents and for becoming involved in school and community affairs as they related to the education of children. In some ways they became the staff of the project.

For many reasons the work with educators did not move ahead as was hoped. Similarly, the cadre's effectiveness in mobilizing larger groups of parents did not move ahead as anticipated. For more on these issues, see the San Andreas case study (Smith, 1979). The work with the cadre, however, had some important successes and is the focus of our description. The parents in the cadre grew in their effectiveness to serve formal and informal roles in influencing events at the school.

From our observations we concluded that the project staff had made a basic assumption that effective solution of fundamental problems facing the schools serving black children cannot occur without a consistent, powerful, shared framework for understanding the world. They realized that a shared framework was not the total answer--for example, effective political action was also necessary. But they felt it was so important that they worked intensively with the parents, helping them to explore the usefulness of the framework which stressed the discontinuity of their own culture and that of the school. Staff helped parents to see elements of the framework they already used but did not recognize. They also helped parents to identify what was in their own best interests, to identify what the real problems were (including some things which other people might not see as problems), to see interconnections between events, and to plan actions within the shared framework of interpretation.

The following comments by parent consultants illustrate the cadre's conviction that concurrence on specific cognitive frameworks is an important ingredient in long-term problem solving. These comments were made in cadre meetings over a period of several weeks during which the cadre was preparing to run a community conference to encourage other parents to participate in the schools.

> "Many parents don't know what you mean when you say community control. They think in terms of what kind of school we already have. They don't think of alternatives to the present situation."*
>
> * * *
>
> "Many parents don't know how the school actually treats children, how it strangles, belittles, and brutalizes. . . What is needed is a cultural revolution like that in China and preceding that long drawn out process is the need for a cadre to educate people to accept concepts like community schools."

Typically the cadre met at least once a week to analyze events, to share interpretations and relevant background and to plan actions. We will share a brief summary of the kinds of issues they dealt with and the ways they dealt with them. This summary illustrates how the dynamics of an approach focusing on developing cognitive frameworks necessitate consideration of general underlying principles as well as specific problems. It also illustrates the importance placed on tying every analysis and action to the general framework.

The cadre spent considerable energy increasing their understanding of black culture. The project believed that although this work might not have been directly addressing specific problems, it was preparing a basis from which future effective action would spring.

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*In this section we have used the convention of setting off quotes by site participants and descriptions of discrete happenings in single-spaced paragraphs. This notation will highlight for the reader a sample of the concrete data upon which our more general descriptions and discussions are based. Exact quotes are set off with quotation marks.

In one sequence of activities they participated in a series of classes on "The Competent Child". The classes were taught by the principal investigator of the project, a psychiatrist, for teachers and parents. He showed participants that there were many kinds of competence besides that typically rewarded by the school. He noted that competency for blacks might well be defined to mean competency in bringing about social transformation rather than in individual accomplishment.

The cadre used this awareness in thinking about school issues. Their ideas about what were problems and what might be solutions were shaped by their emphasis on the disparity betwen the culture of schools and of black culture.

They discussed the Title 1 guidelines for assistance to urban schools which required encouragement of community volunteers. They noted that teachers did not pay much attention to volunteers. In the black community and traditional African societies mutual aid was a consistent feature. They thought that a volunteer program might be thought of in these terms. They considered the traditional role of the leaders and started to plan the involvement of the elderly in the school volunteer program.

The cadre also sought to understand the power issues of how the schools kept black communities from getting what they wanted and needed out of the schools.

The cadre analyzed the integration plans which involved the busing of students and the transfer of teachers. They noted that most plans for helping people deal with the impact of the changes concentrated on the effects on white teachers and students. They discussed the need to "innoculate" black students against the "white washing" they were likely to get in predominantly white schools. They began to plan a program to help themselves and other parents learn black history so they could help their children maintain self-esteem when bused.

The next set of activities that we describe were designed to make parents aware of how things work in the larger political arena. These can be seen as part of the pattern of increasing the cadre members' abilitiy to understand the world in terms of the denial of power to black people and to

take effective action. These activities could also be looked at as political skill training not necessarily related to any framework. Often, however, the skill training was infused with a sense that this knowledge was especially important for blacks because of the American traditions of disenfranchisement.

> The cadre spent a lot of time learning about the regulations and policies of the Board of Education and other agencies affecting their lives. They studied organizational charts and budgets. They learned legal procedures. They followed state and national legislation. They established links with national networks of groups sharing their perspectives.
>
> * * *
>
> Cadre members learned how to evaluate meetings. They learned techniques such as note-taking, tape recording and multi-person debriefing. They became aware of hidden agendas in meetings--for instance the way officials use "hand-picked stooges" to represent the community and the way officials label and isolate people in the audience to limit their impact. They learned how "meeting people" and making contacts were sometimes more important than the content of the meeting.
>
> * * *
>
> They learned about the politics of the city. Because they wanted a crosswalk put across a dangerous street near the school, they invited a representative of their councilman to come talk to them. After the meeting they planned ways to put pressure on the councilman by organizing voters.

As these examples have illustrated, the cadre's foci were wide-ranging. Their struggle to understand the world, to share their interpretations and to learn from them, and to plan, execute, and evaluate actions within their framework impelled and organized their problem solving activities. Because awareness of the framework became a fundamental aspect of how they thought and acted, it seemed as though these cadre members would continue to try to solve the problems of the schools as they saw them long after the funding of

this particular project stopped, and that the shared framework which the helpers had assisted them to elaborate would be a major sustaining force in the struggle.

In spite of the success with the parent cadre of this model stressing consciousness raising, many questions need to be frankly confronted before we can understand how to extend the model. Further, more directed research in other settings would be beneficial. We raise these questions to bring home the point that attending to the development of cognitive frameworks may be necessary but not sufficient to bring about school change.

-- What would need to be done to involve larger groups--educators and other less involved parents?

-- What is the real long- and short-term impact of the cadre's work on the day-to day educational realities of the children? By what process does the sophistication about cognitive frameworks ultimately affect educational outcomes?

-- How powerful can this model really be in face of societal forces which limit its effectiveness? For instance, in San Andreas, a major teacher desegregation order came down and resulted in the transfer of many of the teachers who the helpers and parents had worked with. Several years work was affected.

-- How can this kind of project, which established authorities might see as threatening, survive? This project was not able to find funds to continue their work after NIE funding ended. Because poor parents need support to survive, several had to find other work and thus could not devote much time to work in the schools.

-- How important was the sharing and elaboration of the cognitive framework relative to other features of the setting--e.g. the paid cadre structure, the long-term political connections of key actors, the specific attention to political skill training, etc.?

* * *

Section III

Ways in which the Concept of Shared Cognitive Frameworks Contributes to our Understanding of School Improvement and Problems with the Concept

A. Contributions of Frameworks

Just how important do shared cognitive frameworks and systematic attention to frameworks seem to be in sustaining improvement processes? How do shared frameworks contribute to improvement processes? Our data allows us to raise several thorny questions.

In some situations shared frameworks and an emphasis on their importance did indeed seem to aid the problem solving process. The fact that people* had common ways of interpreting the world and were always seeking to refine these perspectives and apply them to action had the following implications:

Those with shared frameworks tended to identify the same problems, to talk about them in the same language and to share common analyses of their causes. These commonalities seemed to result in an efficiency in the problem diagnosis process. People did not have to spend enormous amounts of time coming to understand each other's basic positions on the frameworks they used to interpet the world. Indeed the persistent and pervasive emphasis on the day to day elaboration of frameworks meant that this work of understanding each other's views was always going on and was a resource or

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*Throughout this paper we refer to "school people" or to "the people the TAGs worked with" or other similar phrases. We mean the staff of the projects who were trying to improve the schools and the parents or educators who became involved with them and also came to share the frameworks.

feature of the setting ready to be drawn upon at any time.

The emphasis on actively using the frameworks to probe and understand the world meant that the groups who shared these perspectives took very little for granted. They sought to go beneath appearances--often not accepting events at face value. They tried to understand how what happened each day was related to their perspective. They tried to anticipate distant ramifications of present events. They questioned actions which to an outsider might seem unrelated to their major concerns or even supportive of what they wanted to accomplish. They explored the connections between disparate events.

They "problematized"* the world--i.e., they questioned everything that happened. In so doing they may have enabled themselves to work more effectively on the most fundamental problems (as they saw them) rather than squandering their time on the most current or apparent problems.

Just as the shared frameworks helped in the problem diagnosis process, they also aided in the search for relevant information, in planning and in the implementation of solutions. Those who shared a well developed framework had guidelines for where to look for outside help and relevant ideas. They were often parts of networks of like-minded people. While it might be argued that this limiting of the range of possible ideas and sources of help to be considered is unfortunate, the limiting can be also be regarded as making the search more realistic. Those who worked within a framework could be much more efficient in their search and had a basis for trusting the outside sources which might not be available to those who don't work within a shared framework. Similarly, sharing of a framework enabled people to be systematic in their planning and implementing. The framework allowed the

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*See discussion of the work of Paulo Friere in Section IV.

group to prioritize more easily. It allowed them to discard whole arrays of possible solutions without much ado because the solutions violated their understandings of how the world works. Finally, it helped them to plan comprehensive solutions whose parts fit together and whose links with the past and the hoped-for-future were clear.

The existence of a shared framework seems to have had an effect on the morale and solidarity of the group of actors who shared the framework. A framework gave people a way of explaining the present state of affairs and of imagining the pathway to a better state. This is more than many parents and educators have in urban schools and thus it generated a hope that seems to be an important contributor to sustained improvement activity.

The elaboration of a framework also served another function. The process brought people into intimate contact and forced them to expose their feelings and the way they saw things and then building on that, the way they felt about them. When this process worked, it built solidarity among those who had come to share perspectives. This solidarity added to the effectiveness of their actions. Thus, both the cognitive unity that comes from a common perspective and the process of arriving at that unity strengthened the group. One of the consequences, of course, might be that those who don't share the frameworks would be rejected.

A cognitive framework which has been developed through the shared process we are describing may be something which is resistant to the turbulence of urban school settings. We are interested in the features of a setting which can sustain improvement activities over a period of years. Frameworks become internalized characterisitcs of groups and individuals, and they are hard to change if they have served people well. Furthermore, even if people get isolated from their original group (as often happens in our transient

urban school setting), the frameworks can still help the person to deal with problems in a way that organizational structures and norms cannot, even though the original group that refined the framework is no longer intact.

B. Difficulties with the Concept of Frameworks

The preceding section has outlined some of the ways we have seen shared cognitive frameworks contributing to sustained improvement activities. Our observation has also made clear several difficulties with thinking about shared frameworks as key to sustained improvement.

It is difficult to make judgments of relative worth among different substantive frameworks. Similarly, it is diffcult to judge whether the process of elaborating and using frameworks or the substantive analytical content of the frameworks is most important in contributing to improvement activity. In observing the nine sites we have encountered a great many different frameworks used by people to interpret their worlds. In fact, the two strongest examples of sites which emphasized frameworks had different frameworks at their core. There are many similiarities but there are important fundamental differences.

It would seem logical to assume that some frameworks would be more useful than others in enabling people to act effectively in the world--i.e., they might be better tools for explaining events and planning actions. For example, some Marxists (as discussed in Section IV) would claim that frameworks other than theirs would be doomed to be less powerful. Our research was not designed to enable us to make definitive comparative judgments among frameworks. Still, there are key differences among sites

in the roles played by cognitive frameworks in the lives of the projects. Attention to cognitive frameworks was critical for some sites, while it was not important for others. In the sites where attention to frameworks had the most impact, frameworks tended to be--(1) central to the project's work; (2) emotionally salient; and, (3) comprehensive. Perhaps the way a cognitive framework is shared, explored, refined and applied to action is as important as its substantive content.

The psychologists and anthropologists who hold a fundamental view about cognitive frameworks believe that to be human is to assign meanings to events and to try to fit things together in the mind. People may use multiple frameworks depending on the different human communities to which they belong. What may be different in different sites is not <u>if</u> they have frameworks but, rather, <u>how</u> they relate to the ones they do have--e.g. how conscious they are of them, how eager they are to elaborate and develop them as a result of widening experience, and how important it is for them to tie their actions to them.

This conclusion confronts us with a dilemma. We can say that the sharing and elaboration of a common framework seems to help sustain improvement actions but we cannot say which frameworks are most effective. Certainly, from our observations we can present examples which we or people in the projects saw as powerful. At the same time we could imagine other frameworks also being powerful.

It is also difficult to judge whether the process the helpers use should be viewed as "raising the consciousness"* of the people they work

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*The term "raising consciousness", as it appears in popular speech, sometimes is used to mean drawing out implicit world views and at other times is used to mean teaching people new explanatory frameworks. We have restricted its use here to mean drawing out implicit world views. It would be valuable for further research to clarify the shades of meaning between these poles in what people actually do.

with or as convincing the school people to adopt their framework. Raising consciousness is seen to be a process of drawing out the implicit world view of the people being worked with. The helpers often assume that the helpees will come to have views similar to their own because those views are the most accurate and comprehensive scheme for understanding the world they share. This kind of formulation is usually seen more positively than that which conceives the helpers as trying to "sell" their framework. Operationally, however, it has been very difficult to judge which formulation most accurately depicts what actually happens.

Another difficulty with identifying attention to the cognitive frameworks of adults in contact with schools as a key feature in school improvement is our inability to assert with real confidence the impact of this approach on children in the schools. We cannot say that the elaboration and use of cognitive frameworks results in improved learning of children in urban schools. We can say that attention to cognitive frameworks in the ways we are describing does seem to result in prolonged and consistent attempts by some of the parents and educators in these settings to improve the educational activities and atmosphere of the school. We can report observations of increased activity levels and feelings of many participants in school settings that their activities were helping the school to become a better place. Still, the reader should note that the the existence of a connection between these kinds of adult activities and (improved) student outcomes remains to be demonstrated.

Another question concerns the practicality of this focus on cognitive frameworks as a way of thinking about how capacities for sustained problem

solving can be built into urban schools. Is it reasonable to ask that all the significant actors in pluralistic American urban settings should come to share a single framework? Is it practical even to work towards this goal?

Finally, we must note that it is often difficult to separate out the relative importance of the attention to cognitive frameworks as opposed to other features of the settings we studied. In each of the instances from our research that convinced us of the contribution of the shared framework, there were important other features--for instance, history of activism, organizational structures, patterns of political activity, amount of time spent, teaching of specific skills, etc.--that also contributed to ongoing improvement activity. (See the other DTA cross-site analysis papers for more details, e.g. Lenoir, 1977; Hyde, 1977; Baldwin, 1977). Similarly, we have observed other sites where there was not an emphasis on frameworks but where improvement actions were supported.

Thus, we cannot now with assurance point to an emphasis on frameworks as the critical variable. We cannot assert that such a focus is absolutley essential or that a focus on frameworks alone can sustain improvement actions. We can assert that a focus on frameworks can make a major contribution in sustaining improvement activity and that it seems like a promising and potentially powerful approach.

* * *

Section IV:

Review of Relevant Theoretical Literature

Although consciousness and cognitive frameworks are not prominent topics in the literature on organizational problem solving or planned change, we have found discussions of them in three other traditions:

1. Cognitive anthropology and sociology;
2. The history of science;
3. Marxist analyses of class consciousness and its importance in social change.

One of the goals of this paper is to demonstrate that the traditions concerned with organizational change and school improvement can be significantly enhanced by incorporating an interest in consciousness.

This section has several purposes. We want to share with the reader a brief review of the traditions which do focus on cognitive frameworks* in order to illustrate what we believe to be an exciting convergence of diverse kinds of thought, and to point to sources in which the reader may wish to delve deeper. We also want to further illuminate how cognitive frameworks influence the way people perceive the world and, ultimately, the way they act.

What are the origins of cognitive frameworks--are they fundamental, almost immutable patterns of thought learned as a child, as one learns to be

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*Actually several of these tradtions do not call what they focus on "cognitive frameworks". We have taken the liberty of using the term to cover this full range of ideas. The reader needs to be aware that those who work within each tradtion might well attack this usage and that, although we have emphasized similarities, differences among the concepts may be significant.

a member of a culture or are they less profound aspects of life which are changeable as one changes one's group membership? What are examples of some important frameworks? Are some frameworks more penetrating or more powerful than others? How can attention to cognitive frameworks promote social change? We cannot definitively answer these questions but we can provide relevant information from these other disciplines.

A. What are Cognitive Frameworks?

For cognitive anthropologists and sociologists (e.g. Tyler, 1969; and Cicourel, 1973) there are organizing principles which underlie all mental behavior. In order to survive in a culture, people need to learn the shared ways of perceiving things and situations. These ways become deeply ingrained cognitive frameworks for processing information. Berger and Luckman (1969) even go so far as to write of the "social construction of reality." That is, in some ways it makes sense to view reality as the understandings and implicit agreements which people living together develop for perceiving and comprehending the social and material environment that surrounds them. By these agreements, people make order out of what would otherwise be chaos. The power of these frameworks to shape reality is demonstrated by a favorite anthropological illustration that in some cultures there are words and corresponding perceptual distinctions between more than twenty varieties of snow, while there are only one or two such words and perceptual distinctions among members of other cultures.

Some social scientists extend this notion of shared determination of reality to settings smaller than whole cultures. For example, Spradley and McGurdy (1972) present research done to discover the underlying frameworks that help to organize reality in a variety of sub-settings in our United States culture. For example, they report on the way elementary school

children classify types of misbehavior in school settings and the way barmaids perceive customers. These participants learn to make many different kinds of gross and fine distinctions that would be lost on outsiders. Such cognitive frameworks help these people to see the world differently than other people would and these perceptions influence their behavior.

If one accepts the possiblity of shared cognitive frameworks being a characteristic of smaller settings such as school communities, then it follows that these frameworks might be very important to how people in these settings go about solving their problems. The frameworks would be important in determining what members of the setting saw as problems and what they saw as potentially effective solutions. The frameworks are the gestalts into which members would fit all perceptions and actions.

Kuhn (1962) has conducted an analysis of scientific research and discovery in terms of the ideas which shape them. He has shown that in each historical milieu certain "paradigms" dominate scientific subcultures and influence the way researchers frame their problems and the way they interpret observations. If one accepts the analogy between scientific and educational problems, then Kuhn's work could be seen as suggesting the same conclusions that could be drawn from the work of the cognitive sociologists and anthropologists. Paradigms and cognitive frameworks are possibly similar in the way they affect the perception and interpretation of events and thus the way they influence problem-solving activities.

Clearly, analysts differ in how they apply the concept of cognitive frameworks. For some, cognitive frameworks are a fundamental aspect of personality and part of the very defining characteristics of being part of a particular culture and hence are not easily changed. These frameworks are

profoundly learned, as a child learns language and the other accoutrements of becoming a social being in a particular human community. For others, frameworks are perhaps not such a fundamental aspect and people simultaneously use several and learn new ones. Nonetheless, there are social agreements which shape perception and conceptualization and which can influence action.

B. Differences among Frameworks and "Correctness" of Frameworks

Among those analysts who do not emphasize the culture-defining nature of frameworks, there is an eagerness to identify the possible origins of differences in frameworks among different subcultures within a society. Their work provides some ba[illegible]or those who believe social change depends on change frameworks. If one can understand what it is about the lives of different groups that leads them to perceive the world differently, then one might be in a better position to help groups change their conditions.

Karl Mannheim, in Ideology and Utopia (1946), notes that the way people interpret society is influenced by their position in society. He suggests that everyone is subject to this influence, including those who want to justify the status quo and those who want to change it, and furthermore that the influence is so powerful as to shape how observations are interpreted. Louis Wirth, in his introduction to Ideology and Utopia, describes Mannheim's insights as follows:

> Professor Mannheim has sought out to trace the specific connection between actual interest groups in society and the ideas and modes of thought which they espoused. He has succeeded in showing that ideologies--i.e., those complexes of ideas which direct activity toward the maintenance of the existing order, and utopias--or those complexes of ideas which generate activities toward changes in the prevailing order--do not merely deflect thought from the object of observation, but also serve to fix attention upon aspects

> of the situation which otherwise would be obscured or pass unnoticed. (Mannheim, p. xxx)
>
> Not only does each of the conflicting factions have its own set of interests and purposes, but each has its picture of the world in which the same objects are accorded quite different meanings and values. (Ibid, p. xxvi)

Thus Mannheim makes a point similar to Kuhn and the cognitive anthropologists and sociologists in stressing the way perception is shaped by cognitive frameworks. Even more, however, he notes that within a given setting there may be different frameworks operating for those with different positions.

Marxists and others interested in revolutionary change take this kind of analysis several steps further. They try to identify the specific dynamics of how social position determines consciousness. They point to economic class as the most important determinant of consciousness or cognitive frameworks. For example, those who are the owners will conceive of the world differently than those who are the workers. Furthermore, Marxists believe there is an inevitable progression through history of one class superceding another and that individuals can facilitate this process by refining their cognitive frameworks to incorporate understanding about this historical progression. Of course, this belief in a progression introduces the idea that some frameworks are more penetrating or "righter" than others--a notion that the anthropologists might disagree with because a cognitive framework is intrinsically "right" for the culture of which it is a part.

When the anthropologists talk about cognitive frameworks, they imply the existence of a multitude of such frameworks--e.g., perhaps at least as many as there are cultures and subcultures. Someone trying to use the idea of cognitive frameworks to explain what impels and facilitates effective

sustained improvement action is faced with difficult choices. What frameworks should people be helped to develop?

The Marxists do not have this dilemma. They believe that they have uncovered the basic clockwork of history and that it is the driving force of events in all the institutions of society. Although there are practical variations within local concrete realities, the class struggle is the fundamental mover. Therefore, when working for societal change, there is no difficulty of choosing among frameworks. The Marxists assume that when individuals are confronted with enough systematic observation of reality and helped to see the relationships between events, they will inevitably come to understand the dynamic principles underlying events and use this framework for interpreting future events.

George Lukacs, a Marxist philosopher and sociologist, describes in his book, History and Class Consciousness, how important a framework is to assigning meaning to facts. He claims that facts and observations are in themselves meaningless. Furthermore, he claims that the Marxist framework, dialectical materialism, is the best framework for perceiving and understanding the world (and, ultimately, for guiding actions).

> The more conscientiously the facts are explored--in their isolation, i.e., in their unmediated relations--the less compellingly will they point in any one direction.
>
> Thus, dialectical materialism is seen to offer the only approach to reality which can give action a direction. The self-knowledge, both subjective and objective, of the proletariat at a given point in its evolution is at the same time knowledge of the stage of development achieved by the whole society. The facts no longer appear strange when they are comprehended in their coherent reality, in the relation of all partial aspects to their inherent, but hitherto unelucidated roots in the whole. (Lukacs, 1972, p. 23)

This belief in an ultimate framework gives rise to the notion of "false consciousness". Before they have come to understand the real dynamics of

events, people may interpet events in other ways, using "faulty" frameworks. Indeed, the dynamics of exploitative situations is such that the oppressor classes lead people to misinterpret their situations. Lukacs describes what constitutes true consciousness and how what people think and feel at particular times may be conditioned by the exploitative situation.

> The determination of false consciousness constitutes an analysis far removed from the naive description of what men in fact thought, felt and wanted at any moment in history and from any given point in the class structure. . . By relating consciousness to the whole of society it oecomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were <u>able</u> to assess both it and interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society.
>
> Regarded abstractly and formally, then class consciousness implies a class-conditioned <u>unconsciousness</u> of one's own socio-historical and economic conditions. . . The 'falseness', the illusion implicit in this situation is in no sense arbitrary; it is simply the intellectual reflex of the objective economic structure. (Lukacs, 1972, pp. 50-1)

To illustrate the claims that can be made about the importance of <u>other</u> origins of frameworks we quote from Bensman and Lillienfeld's book, <u>Craft and Consciousness</u> (1973). They claim that the practice of particular occupations gives rise to certain consciousness or ways of intepreting the world independent of class position.

> This book attempts to develop an approach to the sociology of knowledge based on craft, or occupational technique. It is our contention that major "habits of mind", approaches to the world, or in phenomenological terms, attitudes towards everyday life, and specialized attitudes, and extensions of habits of thought emerge and are developed in the practice of an occupation, profession, or craft. We emphasize craft since we focus upon the methods of work, techniques, methodologies, and the social arrangements which emerge in the practice of a profession as being decisive in the formation of world views.
>
> The emphasis on craft as a generator of habits of mind is in contradistinction to an emphasis on class, particular social and economic positions, or occupational interest, which also emerge from

> the practice of a trade or a profession. These latter aspects of occupation, of course, do exist and contribute to world views and attitudes, but they have already been studied in great detail, perhaps to the point where the additional knowledge gained from such perspectives is minimal. (Bensman and Lillienfeld, 1973, p. 1)

The idea that consciousness or world view can arise from many different perspectives raises some practical dilemmas for analyzing real events for the contribution of consciousness and for using the concept to guide interventions in schools. What is not a framework? If social position and craft give rise to ways of viewing the world, why not race, ethnic origin, sex, regional origins, philosophical positions, membership in voluntary organizations, etc.? Further, when there are multiple frameworks that might be useful for interpreting the world, how can one choose among them? Clarifying the differences between frameworks arising from different origins will be an important topic for further research.

C. Cognitive Frameworks and Social Change

Just how is attention to cognitive frameworks important in promoting social change? It is on this topic that the Marxists and other revolutionaries perhaps made their most important contribution. They show how consciousness, in the sense of being aware of how one's own position influences how one sees events and plans further actions, is crucial to effective action to improve social conditions. The term "raising consciousness" as an approach to helping individuals and communities build capacities to solve problems underscores the importance of this awareness (e.g. Seale, 1970).

For them, one important feature for sustaining long-term improvement action in a setting is widespread sharing of a level of consciousness which allows communities to see how each situation, each event, each potential

action fit into the present reality and future goals. This is seen as especially important in exploitative situations--e.g. a way that some would describe urban schools--where there is a dominant and an oppressed class. The dominant class is seen as structuring the situation so that the oppressed do not clearly comprehend the context and their own interests. Churchville expresses this view as it relates to the condition of black people in America:

> The external problem facing black people is the oppression, exploitation and attempt at dehumanization instituted and perpetuated by the white ruling class. The internal problem facing black people has two facets: intra group and intra individual.
>
> The internal problem of black people as a group is our slave mentality brought about by our acceptance of the values, goals and ideology of the oppressor. This manifests itself in the way we treat one another and in the way we strive--with all our blackness--to emulate the oppressing group in all its ways. (Churchville, 1970, p. 179)

Thus, for one who shares this analysis, the most important actions someone trying to bring about social change can take is to help local people develop an appropriate cognitive framework for interpreting the world and guiding action--for delineating problems. Paulo Friere outlines this kind of action in his book, Education for Critical Consciousness, (1975). The introduction explains Friere's view:

> Paulo Friere's central message is that one can know only to the extent that one "problematizes" the natural, cultural and historical reality in which she/he is immersed. Problematizing is the antithesis of the technocrat's "problem-solving" stance. In the latter approach, an expert takes some distance from reality, analyzes it into component parts, devises means for resolving difficulties in the most efficient way, and then dictates a strategy or policy. Such problem-solving, according to Friere, distorts the totality of human experience by reducing it to those dimesnions which are amenable to treatment as mere difficulties to be solved. But to "problematize" in his sense is to associate an entire populace to the task of codifying total reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and social forces. This reflective group exercise

> is rescued from narcissism or psychologism only if it thrusts all participants into dialogue with others whose historical "vocation" is to become transforming agents of their social reality. Only thus do people become subjects, instead of objects, of their own history. (Friere, 1976, p. ix)

This view emphasizing "raising the consciousness" of people involved in exploitative situations raises several questions: Just how should this work to help people develop frameworks be viewed? It could be seen as helping the people to adopt the helpers' framework and to see its usefulness or it could be seen as guiding the people to become astute observers of their realities, with the assumption that once they saw enough, they would come to the persepctive of the helper; or it could be seen as a more open-ended helping the people to develop their own frameworks whatever they might be. The Marxists with their notions of the power of their own framework and the importance of avoiding "false consciousness" would probably lean toward the first two options.* We will begin to get clarification of these questions as more people attempt to work in this area of altering cognitive frameworks.

Another question is how does raising consciousness differ when one is working with the exploited from when one is working with the exploiters? Most analysts concentrate on the work with the exploited. Still, it is obvious that there is much work that could be done with those who become the agents of the exploiters. In this view many people of good will in

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*Mannheim offers a critique of the Marxists' belief in one true perspective. He notes that they were influential in first alerting analysts to the fact that one's perspective was determined by one's position. He suggests that it is strange for them to then claim they are outside history. He then proposes that the only way true social progress will result is from the willingness of the actors to question their own positions as well as those of others. Marxists would probably claim they question their own positions through praxis (continuing development of theory based on real experience). Nonetheless, even within praxis there seem to be limits on how deep the questioning will go.

helping professions (e.g., teachers, social workers, etc.) confound their own desires to bring about improvement and end up as unwitting perpetuators of what they were trying to change. Their effectiveness in really promoting improvement is dependent ~~on~~ change in their cognitive frameworks. For example, teachers who interpret the world through a framework which fundamentally blames the inner city student for his failure in schools, rather than blaming their own inappropriate or insufficient teaching skills, might be unable to really help that student. For some revolutionaries there is no choice for helpers in these kinds of situations. They must clarify which side they are on "for if they are not part of the solution, they are part of the problem."

Ogbu, in The Next Generation, an anthropological study of the poor in a California community, illustrates the importance of cognitive frameworks in framing genuine solutions to social problems and the tendency for those who are not members of the exploited group to interpret events in a not very useful or even a harmful way. In his book, the "Taxpayers" are middle class white people and "Burghersiders" are the poor, minority people toward whom social programs are aimed.

> The "remedial programs" are essentially products of the beliefs and efforts of Taxpayers. Burghersiders are invited to participate in the programs when they are already in operation in the classrooms. What do Burghersiders think of those "solutions" proposed by Taxpayers to reduce school failures in the neighborhood? Burghersiders are skeptical that these "remedial" programs can solve their problems. They reject the Taxpayers contention that the programs are not very effective because of the negative attitudes of Burghersiders toward school, and argue instead that Taxpayers do not understand their problems and therefore cannot design programs that will solve them. Some say the solutions do not work because Taxpayers cannot "think poor." That is, Taxpayers are rich people and do not understand how the poor think and live.
>
> (Ogbu, p. 232)

In order for the "Taxpayer" people to become genuinely helpful, they would need to modify their cognitive frameworks.

We have tried in this brief review to give the reader a feeling for the analytical traditions which have paid attention to cognitive frameworks and consciousness and which have claimed an important role for frameworks in social change. We have also tried to make clear some of the questions this literature leaves unanswered. We are convinced that those concerned with organizational change and the improvement of schools will find their work enriched by attention to frameworks. We all have a lot more to learn in this area.

Conclusion

Currently popular approaches to improving schools stress such techniques as increasing the effectiveness of sharing research and development information (NIE, 1978) or refining organizational characteristics such as norms, group working skills, or communication and authority structures (e.g., Schmuck & Runkel, 1972). These methods are appealing because they can work with a great variety of schools and with individuals who hold a multitude of views about the world. They are also appealing because they are within the mainstream of American problem-solving orientations, i.e., the identification of particular limited problems, the search for solution options (preferably technical) and the implementation and evaluation of these solutions. These approaches leave many basic social and educational patterns unanalyzed and unchallenged. In the study of some of our nine urban educational change projects we have seen an approach to school improvement that is qualitatively different from these more common ones and has considerable promise.

The urban school change approach which stresses the sharing and elaboration of cognitive frameworks differs from other school problem-solving approaches in several critical ways. Its adherents do not accept the idea that problems are fragmentable and capable of being solved by discrete work on specific ones. Rather, they tend to see most problems as interconnected and as part of larger social webs which must be directly acknowledged, comprehended and contended with.

They do not see problem solving as a discrete process. Rather, they see the necessity of making every act mindfully part of the process of social change. Each moment is analyzed from the perspective of the framework for insights about what actions are necessary to move in the right direction. Problematizing and working to create situations which prevent future problems may be more frequent than problem solving. The link between action and analysis is stressed.

Lastly, its adherents do not see group life in the same ways as some organizational analysts do. They tend not to think of group norms, affectional patterns, authority patterns or shared technical knowledge as the most important bases for group life in social change settings. Rather they claim the overriding importance of shared cognitive frameworks--deep, comprehensive patterns of thought for understanding social events, for sharing information about them and for planning and executing actions.

We are not claiming that this approach which emphasizes shared cognitive frameworks is a panacea for urban school improvement in America. (Indeed, we have shared some of the reservations we have.) We are claiming, however, that it is an approach which stimulated interesting improvement activities in schools in varied urban settings in this country and is worth further analysis and experiment.

Furthermore, it is a crucial approach to consider because it is woefully under-represented in our technocratically dominated view of social change. Our American, pragmatic, concrete reality-orientations find this somewhat metaphysical intellectual tradition more difficult to accept than have Europeans. The fact, however, that variants of this approach (e.g. communist dialectical materialism) have helped to bring about massive social change in other parts of the world should give us pause and lead us to consider how it might be applicable to our situation.

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